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STEVE BELL'S ANIMAL FARM!

SPAGHETTI FUMETTI ◆ ITALIAN COMICS!

COMICS ★ USA

An impossibly rich celebrity's guide

BY ALAN MOORE

○22nd August, Wednesday

It's insufferably hot in Northampton and I can't sleep. Upon the very brink of slumber I am jarred awake by a sudden apocalyptic vision of monstrous towering buildings such as might have been designed by Fritz Lang after an undercooked Chicken Dhansak. New York. Oh Christ, what have I done? I don't want to go. I'll pretend I'm poorly... Clutched fast within the hairy fist of anxiety I crawl beneath the duvet and sob till morning.

○24th August, Thursday

My taxi to Heathrow arrives driven by comic's answer to Robert de Niro, Jamie Delano, who combines scripting 'Nightraven' and 'Captain Britain' with taxi work. Phyllis and the children Amber and Leah make a brave attempt at concealing the turbulent emotions aroused in them by my departure, but I can tell that they are secretly heartbroken. My flight is a seven hour sneak preview of purgatory. I read Alexei Sayle's 'Train to Hell' from cover to cover. I'm sitting in the central aisle and I can't see out of the window. What's the point of flying if you can't see how many thousands of feet you've got to fall shrieking to your death? After touching down at Kennedy airport, I suffer the indignity of waiting in line for an hour with a lot of ordinary human beings before I'm allowed through customs. As I approach the customs point I become nervous. But my quite understandable terror of detainment and rigourous rectal probing evaporates when I see that the customs official looks like Henry from 'Hill Street Blues'. Now I know that I will be alright. Waiting for me is my Limo driver who insists on taking me into New York by a special route obviously reserved for his more exclusive clients. One and a half hours later we are lodged in a traffic jam, where we have been for sixty minutes, and the driver is apologising furiously. He tells me that amongst Englishmen he admires Matt Munroe and Benny Hill. I tell him that, yes, they do enjoy a certain reputation back home.

Ten minutes later he drops me off outside the Warner Communications building on Fifth Avenue. Taking the elevator up to the DC Comics offices, I find the reception and step inside. As I do so I register that someone is sitting just inside the door, behind me, reading a magazine. When I glance round I find myself looking at a life-sized mannequin of Clark Kent. This does nothing for my already tenuous grasp on reality and seems a thoughtless prank to play on a jet-lagged foreigner. The office walls are covered with sunshine yellow enlarged Letratone dots. After the first ninety seconds, this becomes migraine visible. On the door of the men's toilet is a Superman symbol, with Wonder Woman's emblem on the door of the ladies'.

Finally I arrive at the office of my editor on **Swamp Thing**, Karen Berger. This is the first time I've met Karen. Hitherto she has only been a voice over the transatlantic cable. In person she is angelic, both of countenance and disposition, looking after me while I'm in New York and making sure I don't get eaten by subway cannibals or end up sleeping on a grating. Also in the office is John Totleben, who inks **Swamp Thing**. Other than a perpetually blue jaw, he looks almost normal. This is something that I always find unsettling about certain artists. They appear on the surface to be such nice ordinary guys, but having seen their work you know that deep down inside they're unhinged. Despite this I walk with him to our hotel, where the New York Creation Convention is being held over the weekend. We reach John's room and I'm introduced to his wife Michelle, who's far too nice to have known what he did for a living when she married him. Steve Bissette, who pencils ▼**Swamp Thing**, has still not arrived, but since Steve exists outside the Einsteinian concept of time and space, nobody seems surprised. I go down to my room meanwhile and settle in.

The room is big enough to induce mild agoraphobia even in a non-sufferer. I find I'm only able to sleep about three hours a night in it. There is an intimidating air-conditioner unit, which takes me two days to realise I can switch off, and there is a little plate informing me that I should keep the door double-locked at all times and always look through the peephole before answering it, in case it's a bag lady with a meat cleaver and a shopping bag full of index fingers. At six I go down to the lobby. As I step out of the elevator, Steve Bissette steps in, with his wife Nancy and daughter, Maia. He quickly introduces himself before the elevator whisks them up to their room. He says he'll be down in five minutes. Half an hour later I'm still waiting with Karen Berger and John and Michelle Totleben. Just as I'm checking the time of my flight back to Heathrow, the Bissettes turn up and we go out to a Japanese restaurant. Later Karen walks us back to the hotel, we all say goodnight, and I retire to my room to listen until morning for distant gunshots. Unfortunately, the air conditioning is too loud and I pass the night without hearing a single murder.

○25th August, Saturday

I wake up after two hours sleep and order the full continental breakfast. This turns out to be two slices of toast, a glass of juice that is 90% ice and a miniature pot of ▷

▷ tea. There is also a flower floating elegantly in a glass of water. Thank God I ordered the full breakfast, rather than just one slice of toast and a couple of petals. I go and see how the convention's shaping up. I meet Steve and John and we wander round the stalls. The cattle market atmosphere is exactly the same as that at most British comic marts, the mesmerized brain-slaves herded between mountains of tempting consumables. I encounter Marv Wolfman, who tells me he's received his first death threat from a fan - someone who objects to Marv killing the woman he loved. This would be understandable, apart from the fact that the woman was a **Teen Titan** and a totally fictitious character incapable of returning their affection. I know Frank Miller has had four death threats so far for his killing of Elektra. The four of us - Me, Steve, John and Karen - are due to deliver a **Swamp Thing** panel this morning. We find the room just as the Marvel panel is finishing. I run into Louise Simonson, wife of Walt Simonson, who writes **Power Pack** for Marvel, about the only one written for kids not neurotic adolescents. It reads like an Alan Garner book and with June Brigman's crisp clean artwork it's one of the few American comics created entirely by women. The **Swamp Thing** panel goes well, despite the fact that the audience seem prepared to laugh whenever I open my mouth, whether I am saying anything amusing or not. Does the mere possession of an English accent confer Oscar Wildean qualities (by which I mean wit rather than bad teeth and homosexuality) upon the speaker in the ears of the American public?

At mid-day I meet Julius Schwartz and we walk over to the apparently legendary Carnegie Delicatessen. When I read **The Flash** and **Green Lantern** at the age of seven, Julius Schwartz had his name down as editor. I knew his name before Elvis Presley's. It was his strong, individual editorial tone that gave DC Comics of that period their unique atmosphere. Being a megalo-star of some stature myself, I obviously feel awed by very few people, and Julius Schwartz happens to be one of them. Upon meeting me he takes the piss mercilessly out of my accent. This callous humiliation of a foreigner strikes me as an endearing British trait, and we hit it off immediately. Julie orders me a corned beef sandwich, that consists of two slices of white bread with a mound of beef between approximately the size of Micky Rooney.

In the afternoon, back at the convention, Rick Veitch arrives with his wife Cindy. Rick has done sterling fill-in episodes of **Swamp Thing** and the two of us are planning to do a story for **Epic Illustrated**. In the evening we are all taken out to a 'Rib Joint'. After dinner we walk through SoHo and find a comic shop called SoHozat that's still open even though it's 11.30 at night. A massive scruffy place, piled high with comics that are as far away from the American mainstream as it's possible to get. Walking in I'm confronted with a copy of Eddie Campbell's **Alec** with my name on the cover. It's disorientating to stumble on a place at random in New York, in the dead of night, and find your name waiting for you. I buy a Mark Beyer mini-comic starring 'Amy and Jordan' and an obscure volume written by Kathy Acker. I also find a book entitled 'The Water-Bag Couple' which appears to be about enema bondage rituals, but I decide I'd better put it back. We return to the hotel and I lie awake till morning.

○26th August, Sunday

Badly disorientated from lack of sleep but putting on a brave face I breakfast at the Carnegie Deli with Steve and John. The rest of the day we hang out at the convention, and in the afternoon we head over to the Upstart Studio, where Walt Simonson and Howard Chaykin work. I spend time talking to Walt, who's working on **Thor** for Marvel and may be the first person to work on the series with any feel for Norse mythology. We meet up with his wife Louise and Len Wein, co-creator of the first **Swamp Thing**, and go eat Mexican Food. Afterwards, it's back to the Simonson's place for ice cream. Walt shows me his word processor and says I should get one, even though I explain that Britain is still not entirely warmed up to the industrial revolution, and that even people who possess electric toasters are still regarded as warlocks in many parts of the country. I will probably never even buy an electric typewriter. I return to the hotel. I've got to get out of this place. I think I'm going mad!

○27th August, Monday

Before I get up I read through **Mister X**, a comic by the ▼ Brothers Hernandez. It's a stunning piece of work, all set in a huge psychotic city with buildings out of all proportion to the inhabitants. The hero is a detective who never sleeps. It's funny, when I was a kid I always used to identify with the healthy characters. . .

I go to Julie Schwartz office at DC to talk about the **Superman** annual that me and Dave Gibbons will be doing. As I explain the plot he starts throwing in ideas, all good ones. I understand why his editorship made such a difference to DC during its early years. Later, me, Steve and John chat with Dick Giordano, about what we'd like to do in **Swamp Thing**, such as the special vegetable-erotica issue, No. 34, titled 'Swamp Lust'. Leaving DC, I go with the Totlebens and the Bisettes to pick up the car for the trip to Vermont, where I'll be staying a couple of days at Steve and Nancy's home. We break the journey at the Connecticut mansion of Fantagraphics, who publish **Love and Rockets,** and **The Comics Journal**, where we meet publisher Gary Groth, Kim Thompson and the rest of the crew. Their hospitality is excellent, though Gary looks frazzled. Apart from the fact that Fantagraphics is moving to California in a few weeks, **The Comics Journal** is currently involved in a lawsuit with comics writer Michael ▷

▷Fleisher, author of **Jonah Hex**, after the magazine allegedly cast doubts on his sanity during an interview with writer Harlan Ellison. In my sleepless state this lawsuit is just another example of the strange thrashings that the mainstream comics industry is going through here. Pacific Comics, a large independent publisher, has collapsed and every week there is a minor eruption - an argument over rights, a worsening of relationships between DC and Marvel, a new company or artist emerging full of promise. The industry is going through some growing pains, put off since 1963, and I shall be interested to see what emerges, although any number of headless bodies may be left along the way.

Eventually we reach the Bissette's log-cabin deep in the woods. I crawl into Maia's playroom and miraculously fall asleep. Why can I sleep in Vermont but not in New York? They're probably using subliminal rays in New York. These people are Americans and they aren't above that sort of thing . . .

○28th August, Tuesday

Vermont is beautiful - just woods, mountains, isolation and clean air. During the morning me, Steve and John take Maia for a walk in the woods and talk over the upcoming stuff in **Swamp Thing**: the menstrual werewolf and the horrible reproductive cycle of underwater vampire bats. What a way for grown men to make a living. The afternoon dissolves into a pleasant blur of beer, smoke and sweetcorn . . .

○29th August, Wednesday

Another good night's sleep. Will I be able to adjust to New York again? We drive to the airport and I say goodbye. 'Goodbye'. The time I've spent in Vermont is probably the most relaxing and pleasant of my entire trip. Back at New York airport I am immediately assailed by the sheer physical presence of the city. Vermont might as well be on another planet. After dinner I return to my Hotel to lie wide awake all through the night listening to the ice cubes melting in the bucket.

○30th August, Thursday

I go to the Carnegie Deli for breakfast and then manage to walk all the way to the DC offices without getting shot or sexually assaulted. After lunch Lynne Verucci turns up and I go with her over to the studios to prepare a video of myself to be shown at conventions this autumn. This is not my idea you understand. From the studio I take a cab across town to meet Howard Chaykin and Leslie Zahler who create ▲**American Flagg!** I'm taken out to dinner and we're later joined by Frank Miller and Lynne Varley who both worked on **Ronin**. Frank and Howard are two of the most exciting talents in comics at the moment. Both of them have an aura of enthusiasm for comics and feel, like I do, that the medium is in an interesting state of flux where almost anything is possible.

After the meal we walk back to my Hotel. This is my last night in New York. I stay awake for its duration in order to fully savour it.

○31st August, Friday

In the morning I meet Frank Miller and we call up at the Marvel offices, a curious place. The people seem friendly enough, but the atmosphere is very different to the informal cheeriness of DC. The centre of the floor is given over to drawing boards and labouring artisans, while the offices leading off from the main area are apparently the kind that you knock and wait at the door of, before entering. This is probably simple company bias on my part, but with Marvel I did get the impression of a company who make the trains run on time. I don't seem to have an awful lot to say to Marvel and they don't seem to have much to say to me.

THE AMERICAN SPIRIT-THE HONEST, OPENHANDED DRIVING FORCE OF SOLIDARITY--HAS BEEN CASTRATED.
BETRAYED BY THE BANKS...BY BIG BUSINESS...BY SLIMY FAT CATS WHO USE PATRIOTISM LIKE A TART USES CHEAP PERFUME...
COCRNG 26:03
BETRAYED BY THE PLEX.
COCRNG 25:35
BIG DE
WHAT ARE
YOUR HINKY-DI
GONNA DO--
THE GOVER

Afterwards, me and Frank call in at a bar and down some sandwiches and beer. Talking to him, I feel a strong affinity of approach; he tells me about his forthcoming **Batman** series for DC, his face contorting into the different emotions of his characters as he describes them. This is something I do myself, and it comes from a near-unbalanced degree of involvement. Frank tells me that Howard Chaykin's approach is totally different. Howard is very cool and calculating in his construction, or at least that's how it looks to me. Frank, on the other hand, has a more personal and idiosyncratic touch. Out in the street, I notice a smouldering manhole cover reminiscent of those which populate the New York of Miller's **Daredevil**. I point it out to Frank and tell him I thought he'd made them up.

We say goodbye and I head back to the hotel to meet Karen and the Limo to take me back to Kennedy airport. We stand outside for half an hour but it doesn't arrive. Eventually, Karen has to flag down one of the killer yellow cabs. The driver is a young Hispanic guy with dripping black ringlets in the style of Michael Jackson. He says '***I'll have him at the airport twenty five minutes guaranteed, I like to move, I don't wanna wait around, you know what I mean?***' SLAM! The cab takes off on two wheels and I'm splattered against its rear upholstery by the sudden G-force. Outside, the New York landscape flashes by at an oddly tilted angle. Twenty-five minutes later we screech to a half outside the British Airways terminal. ***'Course my best time is twenty minutes!'***

I catch my plane. Later I look out of the window, down upon New York and it looks like either a gigantic bird-eating spider fashioned in fairy lights or a luminous man with antlers. Dinner is served. I drink a Scotch and half a bottle of wine and then fall asleep. I awake hours later, just as we approach Heathrow. We land and I make my way through customs and find Jamie Delano waiting to take me home. He asks what America was like and all I can think to tell him about is a bumper sticker that Steve Bissette saw bearing the legend 'I swerve for hallucinations'. I am utterly blank. I've left my heart in San Francisco, my tie pin in the hotel and my brains all over the back seat of a yellow cab at Kennedy airport. As of this writing, my heart has turned up in the mail and I think I can buy a tie pin just like the old one. Why are there no major comic companies in Bali?